

VZCZCXRO0477

PP RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSR

DE RUEHRA #0009 0061335

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 061335Z JAN 09

FM AMEMBASSY RIGA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5519

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L RIGA 000009

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/06/2014

TAGS: PREL EAID CVIS GG EUN LG

SUBJECT: LATVIA RECEPTIVE TO IDEAS ON GEORGIAN CONFLICTS;
ASKS WHAT ROLE TBILISI?

REF: 08 STATE 134559

Classified By: Ambassador Charles W. Larson, Jr. Reason: 1.4 (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Latvia is open to our thoughts on using carrots and sticks to reintegrate South Ossetia and Abkhazia into Georgia, but wonders if Tbilisi will play the right role when it comes to carrots. To that end, they would like to know more about Georgian reaction to our ideas and what commitments they have given. One step Latvia has taken on its own is to refuse to issue visas to residents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Moscow, insisting they apply in Tbilisi. Attempts to get other EU states to do the same have not yet been successful. Latvia is interested in seeing more robust discussion of these issues within the EU. End summary.

¶2. (C) A/DCM discussed reftel points with Peteris Ustubs, MFA political director, and Eduards Stiprais, new director-general for bilateral affairs at the MFA. Ustubs focused on the incentives part of the package, noting that when he was last in Georgia in December he discussed with the Commission representation he difficulties they faced in getting humanitarian assistance into South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Ustubs understood that the problem was that the Georgians insisted on controlling all aspects of such assistance in a way the Commission found to interfere with its work. Just back from holiday leave, Ustubs was unsure of the latest developments, but thought a more open Georgian approach would be needed to make the plan successful. If Tbilisi was seen as a barrier to aid to these regions, it would undermine any positive impact of such aid on the hearts and minds of the people there towards Georgia and reintegration. Stiprais added that Russia claimed to have lots of money to spend in the region, but much of it was unlikely to reach people who needed it. Stiprais felt the separatist leaders knew this, which is why they were so interested in even the small amounts of EU assistance offered to date. If aid could be distributed transparently and effectively by the West in partnership with Georgia, in contrast to graft and abuse in Russian aid, that would also have a positive impact. But both were nervous that Georgia could effectively play that role and wanted more information on our discussions with Tbilisi to date on these issues.

¶3. (C) On the idea of sanctions, Ustubs said given the low level of Latvian economic activity there, Latvia would be unlikely to issue its own statement telling businesses to stay away from the separatist areas, but he did not rule out a statement by the EU as a whole. He said that a first step on visas should be to insist that all applications from Abkhazia and South Ossetia be handled in Tbilisi, not Moscow.

Someone from Abkhazia applied at the Latvian Embassy in Moscow in December and was sent to Tbilisi to apply. Almost immediately, the Embassy in Moscow received a "very professional" letter in support of the applicant and urging that his application be accepted in Moscow. Ustubs believes that the applicant was a deliberate test of the system. At a lunch of EU pol dir's later in the month, Ustubs suggested that the EU adopt a common position that all residents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia apply in Tbilisi, not Moscow, but

received little traction. Privately, the Germans were quite resistant to such an idea, he claimed.

¶4. (C) Both officials were interested in further discussion of these issues. They asked for information on reaction from other EU members and said they were open to discussing with the Czech presidency how best to advance the dialogue in the EU. Both officials felt that we were more likely to be successful in Abkhazia than in South Ossetia and urged that our plan be flexible enough to acknowledge differences between the two.

LARSON